

**EJ and Air Workshop, September 6-7, 2007
Project Information and Summary**

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1. Please provide a brief Description of your project / activity.

Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) is one of the oldest and most effective grassroots organizations in the United States, using social change strategies to achieve environmental justice. EHC is dedicated to achieving environmental and social justice. We believe that justice is accomplished by empowered communities acting together to make social change. We organize and advocate protection of public health and the environment threatened by toxic pollution. EHC supports broad efforts that create a just society which foster a healthy and sustainable quality of life.

While EHC provides assistance to communities throughout San Diego/Tijuana, the majority of its efforts are directed at communities of color in urbanized areas and the communities around San Diego Bay. The three target communities in this project are: the largely Latino communities of the **Logan Area-San Diego** and **Old Town-National City**, and the ethnically diverse communities of **Western Chula Vista**. In each community EHC has created a Community Action Team composed predominantly of women to lead the process of developing a community plan that will eliminate existing high risk sources of pollution in their neighborhoods, increase affordable housing access and preserve community character.

EHC recognizes the important role women in Latino communities play in protecting the health of their families and first implemented Salud Ambiental, Latinas Tomando Acción (SALTA, or Environmental Health, Latinas Taking Action) more than ten years ago. SALTA has expanded to become EHC's core leadership training program. EHC also recognizes the increased vulnerability of women and young children to toxic chemicals, and therefore promotes the use of the precautionary principle by government in setting environmental standards in order to protect the most sensitive populations.

2. Why is it important for communities to know about this project / activity?

Environmental justice communities need effective advocates for community planning to protect public health, their families, the environment, and neighborhood integrity. EHC's leadership model develops community leaders who will be involved in both their own neighborhood development issues as well as local, regional and state policy issues.

3. What have been the successes and challenges associated with this project / activity?

EHC community leaders have become successful advocates for policy change. Recent accomplishments include:

- removed idling and parked diesel trucks from the residential streets of Barrio Logan to reduce carcinogenic diesel pollution
- continued efforts to develop a **new vision for Barrio Logan**. Members of the Community Action Team dedicated countless hours to developing the Barrio Logan Vision which was completed in early 2005. Community organizing and group presentations resulted in over 1000 resident, community organization and business endorsements.

- launched a community-driven planning process in **Old Town/West Side National City**. Like Barrio Logan, Old Town is threatened with gentrification and inadequate affordable housing for current residents.
- successfully advocated for adoption of the Healthy Homes and Polluter Amortization Ordinances in National City. The Healthy Homes ordinance requires the proactive inspection of all rental units in the city and remediation of health and safety problems identified. The Polluter Amortization ordinance gives polluting industries a set time period for relocating out of residential neighborhoods.
- spearheaded a labor/community/environmental justice coalition to **oppose massive development** on the only undeveloped acreage on San Diego Bay in Chula Vista forcing the developer to withdraw his proposal for 20-story condominium buildings. The Chula Vista City Council and San Diego Port District jointly approved the conceptual plan developed by the community.
- secured passage of California's first lead-safe candy bill by maintaining a highly visible media and community organizing campaign.

Our community leaders share the belief that it is a human right to have decent housing and not to be subjected to toxic pollution, and they share a tenacity to solve problems even when they take a long time. However, many are mono-lingual Spanish speakers with limited experience in dealing with elected officials and decision-makers. Their attempts to expand their involvement in community issues were often met with indifference or even hostility by their families. The leadership training gives them the skills and support needed to move ahead. In order to retain these leaders and nurture their development, EHC has always provided child care, transportation when needed, and simultaneous translation for public meetings/hearings.

4. Where can communities go for more information about this project/activity? (web and/or contact information)

More detailed information can be obtained at the EHC Internet website at

<http://www.environmentalhealth.org/about.html>

The e-mail contact is ehc@environmentalhealth.org